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PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

OF

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

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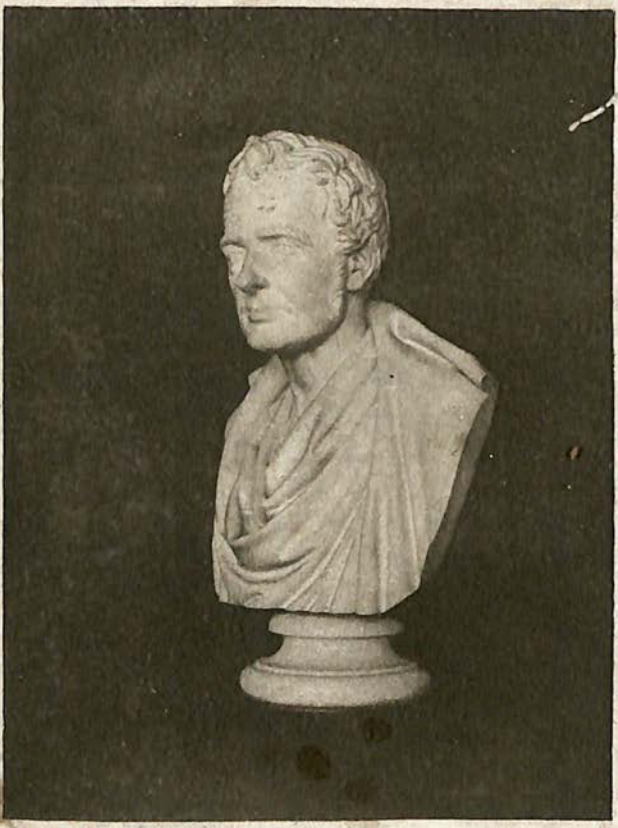

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

OF

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

BY

JOHN RITCHIE FINDLAY

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EDINBURGH
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1886

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

BUST OF DE QUINCEY BY SIR JOHN STEELL, R.S.A. . . . . *Frontispiece*

MEDALLION BY SHAKESPEARE WOOD *Title-page*

CHALK DRAWING BY JAMES ARCHER, R.S.A. *Page 1*

INTRODUCTION.

SOME explanation of the origin of this little volume may be expected and permitted.

An elegant edition of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* has lately appeared,[1] to which are appended some interesting notes of conversations with De Quincey from the pen of a Mr. Richard Woodhouse, barrister of the Temple, a young man of literary tastes, who, says Mr. Garnett, "himself wrote nothing for publication, but mingled with the brilliant literary circle which, about the year 1820, gathered round Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, publishers of the *London Magazine*, in which the *Confessions* originally appeared."

[1] *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater.* Edited by Richard Garnett. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co. 1885.

The perusal of these notes induced me to turn to notes which I myself had taken of conversations held with De Quincey thirty years later. I do not profess—indeed I desire explicitly to disclaim—the art and practice of note-taking of this kind: an art and practice which the late Mr. Nassau Senior, for example, carried to the utmost stretch and perfection. Though I have had the honour and pleasure of knowing and talking familiarly with many men of considerable distinction in letters and in public life, the desire to record such intercourse never overcame me save in this one instance. This of itself may be taken as a humble testimony to the singularly attractive and impressive character of De Quincey's talk. The notes were taken at the time merely and solely for the refreshment of my own memory; if it ever afterwards occurred to me that they might be of other use, I always felt that they could be so used only after a consider-

able lapse of years. With the lapse of thirty years or thereby reasons against publication have lapsed likewise, and there now seems to me nothing to prevent those scanty jottings being given to the world of De Quincey's admirers, to be taken for what they are worth.

The notes extend over a period of seven years—1852-59—the last years of De Quincey's life. They were mere memoranda pencilled on scraps of paper, sufficient to refresh an originally vivid and retentive memory, until, fearing its failure to keep hold of connecting links, I found leisure fifteen years ago to put the scraps into shape and write them out clearly and fully. In this state they have been seen and read over by one or two of my friends who knew and admired De Quincey; I think only by John Hill Burton, Alexander Russel, and John Brown—all now, alas! no more. I have recently felt it my duty to submit them to

Mr. De Quincey's surviving daughters, and their approval to the present publication has been most heartily accorded.

The notes appear here, with one or two trivial excisions, exactly as they were written out in 1870; I have thought it better to relegate to the foot of the page anything like explanation or addition.

J. R. FINDLAY.

1885.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

OF

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

MY friend Mr. John Hill Burton had often promised to introduce me to Mr. De Quincey, knowing that I took great interest in his writings, although at that time I was acquainted with them mainly through such stray articles as I had read in magazines.

On the 10th January 1852 Mr. Burton and I walked out to where Mr. De Quincey was residing, with his three daughters, in a cottage at Mavisbank, a sort of upper suburb of Lasswade. We were received by Miss De Quincey and Miss Florence.[1]

[1] Miss De Quincey (Margaret) married in 1853

Before reaching the house Mr. Burton had warned me that it was twenty chances to one whether we would see De Quincey, as he was very shy of strangers, or visitors of any sort, and that I might consider it a great favour if he made his appearance. Miss Florence ascertained that her father was visible, and in a very few minutes he entered the room—a man, once seen, never to be forgotten. His appearance has been often described, but generally, I think, with a touch of caricature.[1] He was a very little

Mr. Robert Craig, who settled as a farmer in Tipperary. She died in 1871, leaving one son, now a captain in the Royal Artillery, and a daughter, now married. Florence married in 1855 Colonel Baird Smith, R.E., who died in 1861, leaving two daughters. Emily, the third daughter, I did not have the pleasure of seeing till a subsequent visit. See Appendix A.

[1] The "Thomas Papaverius" description in *The Book Hunter*, the best known—and the best—of these, certainly errs on this side. It recalls the features, the complexion, the expression and aspect of its subject much as vigorous and highly-coloured caricature portraits—in *Vanity Fair*, for example—recall noble and honoured faces and figures. We acknowledge and smile at the likeness, with a secret grudge at the perverted power of the limner.

man (about 5 feet 3 or 4 inches); his countenance the most remarkable for its intellectual attractiveness that I have ever seen. His features, though not regular, were aristocratically fine, and an air of delicate breeding pervaded the face. His forehead was unusually high, square, and compact.[1] At first sight his face appeared boyishly fresh and smooth, with a sort of hectic glow upon it that contrasted remarkably with the evident appearances of age in the grizzled hair and dim-looking eyes. The flush or bloom on the cheeks was, I have no doubt, an effect of his constant use of opium; and the apparent smoothness of the face disappeared upon examination. The best description of his peculiar appearance in this respect is one given by Sir Walter Scott in reference to General Platoff, whom Scott met at Paris, and from whom, he tells

[1] As the hair got thinner on the upper part of the head the brow assumed a more arched aspect, as seen in Mr. Archer's drawing, which gives a very good idea of De Quincey's ordinary appearance in his later years—a familiar rather than an intellectual version, however.

us, he took his portrait of Mr. Touchwood in *St. Ronan's Well.* "His face, which at the distance of a yard or two seemed hale and smooth, appeared, when closely examined, to be seamed with a million of wrinkles crossing each other in every direction possible, but as fine as if drawn by the point of a very fine needle." Mr. De Quincey's eyes were dark in colour,[1] the iris large, but with a strange flatness and dimness of aspect, which, however, did not indicate any deficiency of sight. So far as I ever observed he saw distant objects tolerably well, and almost to the very end of his life he could read the smallest print without spectacles. I remember on one occasion he talked about George Gilfillan's pen-and-ink portrait of himself, in which the Reverend George spoke disparagingly of his eyes, declaring that De Quincey never looked people straight in the face. He resented keenly the imputation that he had anything approaching to a squint, still more keenly, in

[1] The Scotch word "blae" would best express the shade.

his own humorous style, the insinuation, which he declared George intended, that he had also a "moral squint." He had certainly neither the one nor the other; he looked quite straightforward at one; but it was often difficult to catch his eyes from the hazy expression diffused over them. They had the dreamy look often observable in students or in short-sighted people.[1]

No one who ever met De Quincey could

[1] Persons suffering from such weakness of eyesight are liable to be accused of declining to look an interlocutor fully in the face, simply because their doing so involves a painful strain on their eyes in the attempt to adjust the focus to the distance between the speakers, especially if one eye be weaker than the other. This seems to have been De Quincey's case; but Gilfillan's description, which appeared originally, I think, in *Tait's Magazine*, and was reprinted in his *Gallery of Literary Portraits*, 1845, goes further than this. He says: "His eyes, they sparkle not, they shine not, they are lustreless: can that be a squint which glances over from them towards you? No. It is only a slight habit one of them has of occasionally looking in a different direction from the other; there is nothing else particular about them; there is not even the glare which lights up sometimes dull eyes into eloquence."

fail to be struck, after even the briefest intercourse, with the extreme sweetness and courtesy of his manners. He had the air of old-fashioned good manners of the highest kind; natural and studied politeness, free from the slightest ostentation or parade; a delicacy, gentleness, and elegance of demeanour that at once conciliated and charmed. As Mr. Burton was well acquainted with the family, and had much to say to the young ladies, De Quincey and I were left for the most part to carry on a sort of side conversation between ourselves, a position which at first I found sufficiently embarrassing. Here I was, a novice, set face to face with one of the greatest masters of conversation —of a special kind of it at least—of his day, with the talk drifting about to all sorts of subjects, for none seemed to come amiss to him. In any attempt to transcribe, or rather describe, his conversation, the chief difficulty would be to fix—perhaps to account for—a certain evanescent charm which every one felt, but which can be only remembered, not transmitted. It was in fact an exquisite

and transient emanation from the intellectual and moral nature of the man, enhanced in its effect by the rare beauty of his language, and the perfectly elegant construction of every phrase and sentence that he uttered. The comparison which the American poet and critic and diplomatist, Mr. James Russell Lowell, makes of good style to good breeding is admirably applicable alike to De Quincey's literary style and to his personal manner. Lowell speaks of "that exquisite something called style, which, like the grace of perfect breeding, everywhere persuasive and nowhere emphatic, makes itself felt by the skill with which it effaces itself, and masters us at last with a sense of indefinable completeness." He did not quite, as Burton had told me he would do, talk magazine articles, but the literary habit was notable, though not in the least obtrusive, in all his talk. One effect of this was somewhat trying to an inexperienced listener, for when in the flow of his conversation he came to the close of one of his beautifully rounded and balanced paragraphs, he would pause in order to allow you to have your

say, with the result sometimes of rather taking one aback, especially as the subject of conversation often seemed to have been brought, by his conduct of it, to its complete and legitimate conclusion. The listener was apt to feel that he had perorated rather than paused. In his mode of conversing, as in everything else, his courtesy of manner was observable. He never monopolised talk, allowed every one to have a fair chance, and listened with respectful patience to the most commonplace remarks from any one present. The fact that any one was, for the time, a member of the company in which he also happened to be, evidently in his eyes entitled the speaker to all consideration and respect. But he had a just horror of bores, and carefully avoided them. We talked, among many other things, about Macaulay, and about his prodigious power and love of talk. De Quincey remarked that such passion for speaking was usually the sign of a weak and shallow mind, but that Macaulay was a remarkable exception to this rule—that he was the only man of

real power and substantial acquirements of whom he had ever heard, who was possessed by "an actual incontinence of talk." Even Coleridge, regarded as the greatest talker of the day, would not always talk, whilst Macaulay seemed ready to pour forth a flood of disquisition and information at any given time. With Coleridge there was always one difficulty, and sometimes two. It was sometimes a great difficulty to get him to begin to talk; it was always so to get him to stop.

On our leaving, Mr. De Quincey accompanied us to the door, and whilst he was standing in the little garden-plot in front of the house I observed that his feet had been thrust stockingless into an old pair of slippers. And here he was, a man of sixty-three years of age, and apparently of extreme feebleness, thus standing bareheaded in the raw air of a January afternoon. We remarked that he would catch cold, and were hurrying away, but he begged us not to be the least uneasy on his account, for he never did take cold; it was one of the many advantages of opium that it pre-

served him against all such trivial accidents. His dress, to an allusion to which I have thus been drawn incidentally, was at all times peculiar. His clothes had generally a look of extreme age, and also of having been made for a person somewhat larger than himself. I believe the real cause of this was that he had got much thinner in those later years; whilst he wore, and did wear, I suppose till the end of his life, the clothes that had been made for him years before. I have sometimes seen appearances about him of a shirt and shirt-collar, but usually there were no indications of these articles of dress. When I came to visit him in his lodgings, I saw him in all stages of costume; sometimes he would come in to me from his bedroom to his parlour, as on this occasion, with shoes, but no stockings, and sometimes with stockings, but no shoes. When in bed, where I also saw him from time to time, he wore a large jacket—not exactly an under-jacket, but a jacket made in the form of a coat, of white flannel; something like a cricketer's coat in fact. In the

street his appearance was equally singular. He walked with considerable rapidity (he said walking was the only athletic exercise in which he had ever excelled) and with an odd one-sided, and yet straightforward, motion, moving his legs only, and neither his arms, head, nor any other part of his body—like Wordsworth's cloud—

"Moving altogether, if he moved at all."

His hat, which had the antediluvian aspect characteristic of the rest of his clothes, was generally stuck on the back of his head, and no one who ever met that antiquated figure, with that strangely dreamy and intellectual face, working its way rapidly, and with an oddly deferential air, through any of the streets of Edinburgh—a sight certainly by no means common, for he was very seldom to be seen in town—could ever forget it.[1] He was very fond of walking, but generally his walks were merely into town to his publisher's

[1] See Mrs. Baird Smith's description of her father's mode of dressing, p. 361, vol. i., of (*Thomas de Quincey: his Life and Writings.* By H. A. Page. Two vols. London, 1877.

office (Mr. Hogg's, then in Nicolson Street) and back again to Lasswade. Till he was nearly seventy he took this walk—one of twelve miles—without inconvenience.

At this introductory meeting at Lasswade it was arranged by Miss De Quincey that Mr. Burton and I should come out to dinner ten days afterwards, and on Monday, 19th January, we again walked out. The family party was on this occasion augmented by his third daughter, Miss Emily, but Mr. Burton and I were the only strangers. At dinner we talked on ordinary topics, in which small and table talk De Quincey was always as ready to join as in the most abstruse discussion. He took an interest in, and kept himself up with, all the current topics of the day; knew the latest accident and incident reported in the newspapers, as well as the minutest occurrences recorded in the lives of distinguished characters of past generations.[1] When

[1] He read the newspapers sedulously; and Dr. Warburton Begbie, in his notes on De Quincey's last illness, says: "Whether seated in his chair or lying in bed, I equally found him attempting to read without spectacles, which he never employed. The

the ladies left, Burton and De Quincey got upon talk about old authors, and on questions of history and classics that were beyond my depth; so that sometimes for considerable intervals I was left stranded on the shore, with this double tide of erudition and speculation ebbing and flowing before me. Among other things we had some conversation about ecclesiastical matters—about the habit that every ecclesiastical set, every church or corporation, has of abusing and denouncing its rivals, and of the ingenuity with which each could fasten upon the other Scriptural symptoms of reprobation. De Quincey remarked that this was really not a difficult matter. "I think," said he, "it would be a very easy task for any one

Scotsman, if not in his hands, was very near him, and he highly prized it, styling it a wonderful newspaper, exhibiting a versatility of political, chiefly, but of varied talent, such as, he believed, had never been surpassed." As this passage is omitted from the version of Dr. Begbie's notes given by Mr. Page (see *Life*, vol. ii. p. 295), I have a natural and, I hope, excusable, pride in printing it here from the original manuscript.

possessed of ordinary powers of research, and some knowledge of the great Antichrist controversy, by the exercise of moderate ingenuity to fix down all the marks of Antichrist—of course you don't for a moment suppose that I in the slightest degree believe in the popular notion and theory of Antichrist—but certainly all the popular signs and characteristics of Antichrist might be very readily fixed down upon the Presbyterian Church of Scotland." The placidity of manner and tone with which he enunciated this, and other startling propositions, corresponded well with the description which Bayle gives of an eccentric philosopher who was burnt in Paris in 1573, for "privately dogmatising upon Atheism," and who, says Bayle, "although he maintained his heterodox opinions until death, always pronounced them with a sweetness and gentleness of manner, and from a mouth made up for the delivery of the most refined phraseology." We had some speculation as to the terrific denunciations which would follow the publication of a treatise on this subject, and in this tone, from a man able

to exercise such perverse ingenuity as he described—none better fitted to do so, as I ventured to hint, than himself. Once, after some pause in the conversation, De Quincey and Burton began to talk at the same moment. Burton, of course, at once gave way. This, however, De Quincey would not permit, and after a prolonged struggle in politeness De Quincey carried his point by bargaining that, when Burton had said his say, he would be prepared to follow with the remark he had been stopped in making. Burton having accordingly at some length delivered himself, asked De Quincey to take his turn. But by this time oblivion had covered up what he had intended to say, leading him to indulge in a humorous lamentation over his lost idea, regarding which he said all that he could be certain was, that it was unquestionably a brilliant and original one, which might have shed light upon some of the great questions that perplex the world; though now, to the lasting loss of humanity, the spark had gone out for ever.

In the course of the evening a curious

episode occurred. The perfect quiet of the rural roadway or lane was suddenly broken by the sound of children's voices singing. The whole household went to the door, and found in the little garden plot a party of "guisers," who, their song finished, were sent away with some small gratuity. Whilst the little group, including the ladies and the maid-servants, were gathered in the doorway looking at and listening to the children singing, De Quincey stood silent, and appeared to have lapsed into a sort of dream, which abstracted state continued for a few minutes after our return to the dining-room. He had evidently misunderstood the character of his visitors, and instead of rightly regarding them as village children on an evening frolic, fancied that they were in actual distress, and making a somewhat peculiar and more than usually clamorous appeal for charity. Silence was strikingly broken by his exclaiming, "All that I have ever had enjoyment of in life, the charms of friendship, the smiles of women, and the joys of wine, seem to rise up to reproach me for my happiness

when I see such misery, and think there is so much of it in the world."

After we had rejoined the ladies, in talking about our having to walk home in the dark, there were some jokes about the possibility of our being attacked and garrotted. We both remarked that we would be poor subjects of plunder, when De Quincey said that we would certainly not be such profitable subjects as a young gentleman whom his son had lately brought out to visit them, and whom they had made very uneasy on the score of the risks he ran. He was covered, De Quincey said, with magnificent jewellery —hung over with chains, rings, breastpins, etc. De Quincey speculated upon the pleased surprise with which any party of garrotters would regard the capture and plunder of such a gilded youth. They would have rejoiced, he said, as did the pirates of old when they came across, not an ordinary prize, but a Spanish galleon. The young ladies played overtures and other pieces on the piano, one of which De Quincey particularly praised, saying that it

soothed him like a delicious anodyne. Miss Florence remarked that it was a poor compliment to the music to say that it set him to sleep. He explained to her, with burlesque excess of particularity and politeness —the humour of which he himself evidently enjoyed as keenly as the amused auditors— that it was really the highest compliment he could pay to it, for he meant that the music was giving the greatest spiritual gratification, and being to him, for the time, the highest good, as making him, usually so miserable, temporarily happy; and therefore fulfilling its purpose, though not, perhaps, in the ordinary way or according to rule.

On our leaving, Mr. De Quincey, though the night was dark and the road tortuous, insisted upon accompanying us to Loanhead, in order that he might show me the ultimate point to which the Lasswade coach would carry me in the direction of his house, "when next I did him the honour to come out to see him." On the way I asked him if he ever visited his old friend Professor Wilson, who was at that time residing in bad health

with his brother in Dalkeith. He said he had not. His reason for not going to see him was, he said, that he understood Wilson, from the nervous condition of mind into which he had fallen, did not care to see visitors; was not, indeed, able to receive them. "I have, however, intended for a considerable time to write to him. I have not yet accomplished my purpose, but I shall probably make it out to-morrow." He continued, "The misfortune of the case, and the consideration which retards me from writing, is that I have two motives for doing so—one an interested motive, the other a disinterested one. And when these two go together, the former, like Pharaoh's lean kine, swallows up the latter, entirely annihilates it, and leaves only the interested one standing in its native and loathsome leanness. I have, you will believe me, the most sincere desire to ask after my old friend John Wilson's welfare, but years ago he did me a service which I in some sort now require to have renewed. The circumstances were that, among many wander-

ings, I had settled for some time in Glasgow. I had left there a number of books and manuscripts of some value to myself, although not perhaps of very much to any other person. Subsequently, when residing in Edinburgh, I wished to place those articles out of the risks of such accidents as arrestments and the like. Being acquainted with no one in Glasgow who could aid me in such a difficulty, and knowing Wilson's connection with the west of Scotland, I naturally applied to him, and received from him a letter of introduction to a Glasgow bookseller. On presenting the letter this gentleman expressed in the strongest terms his willingness to do anything whatever to oblige his friend Wilson. Of course, reinforced by such aid, I felt as if I had come into the possession of Aladdin's lamp, Wilson's friend being the genius who, thus called up, was ready to relieve me from all my troubles—a man who said to his servants, Come, and he cometh; go, and he goeth; do this, and he doeth it; and who furnished me with all the necessary means for recovering and transporting the

books and manuscripts. They were deposited in safety, and I returned home in triumph. This was some years ago, and my present dilemma is, that I have totally forgotten not only the name of the street and the appearance of the place in which they were deposited, but also the name and address of the gentleman to whom Wilson gave me the introduction. My unfortunate chattels, therefore, instead of being rescued from destruction, are plunged into a deeper and more hopeless oblivion than ever. This, you will see, is what I want to know from Wilson, not, of course, where the books are placed, but the name of the gentleman to whom he introduced me, and I shall certainly write to him one of these days."[1]

[1] Those are no doubt the papers afterwards restored to him by the ingenious intervention of Mr. Hogg: see Page, vol. ii. p. 8. My memory even now (1885) retains assurance that in this case I report almost word for word De Quincey's phrases. I do not know that in all cases where I have in like manner reported him I could be quite so certain, but must be content, like Mr. Woodhouse, to give the substance of what he said "somewhat in his own manner," with the view of affording "some idea of the general tenor of

On another evening (10th November 1853) on which I went to Lasswade again with Mr. Burton, Mr. R. M. Craig, who soon after married Miss De Quincey, was of the party; and this was the only occasion of the many times I saw De Quincey, at all hours and under varied circumstances, on which he did not shine—that is to say, he was languid and dull. He was probably suffering from mental stress and want of sleep, or possibly from the reaction supervening on one of his terms of extra addiction to opium. We had little talk with him during dinner, and he made almost no effort to join in, or keep up the conversation. In the evening, however, he brightened up a bit, and we had some good discussion about Dr. Johnson. Johnson's contradictoriness,

his conversation, and of the richness of his mind, and of the facility with which he brings in the stores of his reading and reflection to bear upon the ordinary topics of conversation." But I feel, as Mr. Woodhouse says he did, "that it can convey no adequate impression [either of those qualities, I may add] or of the eloquence and scope of his language." Those felicities were indeed too delicate and transient to be so caught and transmitted.

and his remarkable want of knowledge of, or adherence to, first principles, were strongly dwelt upon by De Quincey. The only writings of Johnson's which seemed to him to indicate any appreciation and hold of first principles were the law papers which he drew up for Boswell. Johnson evidently did not appreciate, did not comprehend, the high philosophic powers of Burke for example; even as such powers were indicated in Burke's *Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful*, a subject that would naturally interest Johnson.

Talking about the Scotch accent and language, and remarking how pleasant a dialect Scotch was if spoken without vulgarity on the one hand or affectation on the other, I instanced Lord Cockburn as one of the best speakers of Scotch that I ever heard. De Quincey demurred a little, on the ground that Cockburn prided himself rather too much upon it, and that there was in his Scotch the slightest shade of that affectation which had been deprecated. Remarking on the light in which the Scotch tongue was regarded by the English, I complained of the unconcealed

contempt with which the vulgar English regarded any indication of Scotch pronunciation, and expressed a fear that the same dislike extended pretty well up in society. This De Quincey and Miss Florence vehemently denied, maintaining that in good English society they never heard the speaking of Scotch, unless it were obviously tainted with vulgarity, remarked on otherwise than as giving additional interest to the person using it.

On Sunday, 25th June 1854, in the course of a walk I met De Quincey at the Dean Bridge at the close of the afternoon service. He told me that he was staying in town, and that he had taken advantage of the quiet of the Sunday afternoon for a walk, but that he unfortunately miscalculated his time, and, seeking for solitude, had found himself in the midst of a crowd of gay and fashionable people returning from church, or walking after church. With his usual politeness he insisted upon walking back towards town with me, in spite of the crowds. He did so to the west end of Princes Street. I returned again with him to the end of the Dean Bridge.

He insisted upon going back with me; and so we walked back and forward five or six times. He began conversation by telling me that he was extremely desirous of sending to one of my sisters—who were by this time acquainted with him and his daughters—a copy of the newly published third volume of his works.[1] He had been unable, however, he said, to ascertain whether we spelt the name Findlay with or without a "d," and that this "d" difficulty had prevented him inscribing, as he intended to do, the volume; for of all the petty breaches of good manners that he desired most to avoid, was that of either miscalling or mis-spelling any one's name. He considered it unpardonable in the case of any one with whom you have any pretension to acquaintanceship; and his want of precise knowledge had proved an insuperable obstacle to his carrying out the intention referred to. He had consulted his publisher on the point, but he could not give him any certain or trustworthy information. He had not supposed, he said, that young ladies would

[1] *Selections: Grave and Gay*, etc. Hogg.

be at all interested in the biographical portion of his book, of which the two first volumes mainly consisted, but the third, being more of a narrative, might, he thought, amuse them. I told him that they had read all the three with great interest, but that, nevertheless, they would attach a high value to his proposed present; which, of course, never came.[1] He explained that he had left Lasswade partly to be near books and libraries to complete his fourth volume more conveniently, but partly also for change, and from a desire which perpetually haunted him to fly from himself. "I often," he said, "feel an almost irresistible inclination to rush away and bury myself among books in the

[1] This arose, I believe, from real incapacity to carry out his intentions in such matters; a sort of paralysis of the will suspending the action that ought to have followed the intent—a condition all nervous people can more or less understand, as being so far subject to it themselves. It is aggravated by anything like a dilemma or a choice of courses; in those cases the impulse, faint enough perhaps to carry action into one course, gets hopelessly dissipated in the contemplation of more than one; though I suspect that De Quincey rather enjoyed being subject to such dilemmas.

heart of some great city like London or Paris." I asked for his daughters. He said he had not seen nor heard of them since he left Lasswade, some three weeks before. He never wrote letters, and did not wish to receive any; therefore he had no means of knowing how they were, unless he walked out to ask for them, which he intended to do very soon. Passing across the Dean Bridge, he remarked upon the peculiar beauty of the view—the mixed elements in it, the noble city view, imposing mansions on the one side, and trees, hills, and the sea in the distance, and yet apparently in immediate proximity. It was a *rus in urbe*, or, more properly, it was a town in the country. Once, in walking with him in moonlight on George IV. Bridge, before it was so much built up as it is now, he spoke enthusiastically of the dark masses on the west side of the Bridge, crowned by the broken bulk of the castle with all its romantic associations.[1]

[1] This moonlight walk arose out of a highly characteristic trait. He had dined with me at George Square; he preferred an early hour, and our small

We got, somehow or other, into a sort of sad, and almost too personal, mood of converse, in the course of which he spoke

party had sat down to dinner at five or six o'clock. The two or three guests, all equally fascinated and delighted with his talk—only my uncle,[1] Russel, and Burton probably—had left us one by one: my uncle for the country, where he was staying, I inhabiting alone his house in town; Burton, unceremoniously enough when he thought fit to go; and at last Russel, about eleven o'clock, he having his work at the *Scotsman* office for next morning's paper, as I had also. After fully an hour more had slipped away I was obliged to tell De Quincey that I too must go. Then came elegant apologies, undoubtedly sincere, and we left together, my desire being to see him safe home to his lodgings in Lothian Street. No, he would accompany me through the silent midnight streets that fine summer evening. So we walked backwards and forwards for probably another hour between the High Street (where the office of the *Scotsman* then was) and Lothian Street, till at last the inevitable "good-night" was spoken. I got to my post to find my work for the night all but finished by Mr. Russel, who immensely enjoyed the "fix" in which he had left me, and was much surprised at my having, by any device or exercise of moral courage, got out of it. As De Quincey said of Coleridge that the first difficulty was to get

[1] Mr. John Ritchie, proprietor of *The Scotsman*; Mr. Russel being its editor.

in that tone of despondency into which he occasionally fell, of the melancholy that

him to begin to talk and the second to get him to stop, so of De Quincey the first difficulty was to induce him to visit you and the second to reconcile him to leaving. He would have sat up talking all night on this or any other night as readily as he did one night with Mr. Woodhouse (Mr. Garnett's edition of the *Confessions*, p. 212) (in that case also after a long sederunt at dinner), quietly happy in the exercise and interchange of thought, and oblivious of the lapse of time. He ate almost nothing (we were always careful to have some light soft food prepared especially for him), he drank nothing, even under "social pressure," beyond one or two wine-glassfuls of extremely weak brandy and water, and out of his own lodgings I never saw him touch laudanum. He seemed on such occasions truly, as he calls himself in his *Confessions* or *Autobiographical Sketches*, "an intellectual creature," independent of the ordinary wants and conditions of humanity. Something of congenial company—once he was in it; for it was not a necessity to him; it sought him, not he it—with speculative and pleasant talk, so beguiled for him hours that might otherwise have been weary and heavy-laden that they glided on unregarded by himself, and only reckoned by his companions as too short to have had crowded into them so much worth remembering that each memorable opinion or expression was but too apt to jostle the other out of recollection.

attached to looking back upon life; how small is the benefit which people in the course of it obtain from experience which they really only acquire when they have little further use for it; and how mortifying it is to reflect how very different a man's course might have been had he known at the beginning what he knows at the end of it. For himself, he said, so "stale, flat, and unprofitable" was the retrospect, that he turned away from it "shuddering and ashamed."

I told him that Dr. Robert Lee[1] had expressed a desire to be introduced to him, and asked if I might take the liberty of bringing him to call. He said he should be delighted. "I have long known him," he said, "from his public appearances, have admired his learning and liberality, and had I not been the miserable, incapable creature that I am in all such matters, I should certainly have

[1] Minister of Old Greyfriars' Church, Edinburgh. He was a leader of liberal thought and practice in the Church of Scotland, and as usual was denounced and persecuted in its courts, his great merits and services only now coming to be fully acknowledged—fifteen years after his death.

sought an introduction to him long ago. I should, therefore, be extremely grateful to you if you will so far trouble yourself in the matter as to be the medium of bringing us together." I remember, either on this or on a subsequent occasion, speaking to him of Dr. Lee's pulpit appearances, and asking him if he would not come to hear him preach. He said that he never went to church; on which I remarked that probably he had not persisted so long in doing so as another friend of mine who declared that he went to church until it became a sin to go. He said he feared that he could not entertain the idea of returning, even to hear Dr. Lee, for the irksomeness which he had often endured of sitting listening to a man groping and fumbling, where he saw a clear way to leap, was so intolerable that he could not subject himself to the slightest risk of a repetition of such mental agony.

Mr. Burton, hearing that De Quincey was in town, asked him to supper, and requested me to call at Lothian Street for him on my way from George Square to Ann Street,

Stockbridge—where Burton then lived—and if possible to bring him with me. On calling on the evening in question (28th June 1854) at De Quincey's lodgings, I found he had left a message for me, to say that he would meet me on the Dean Bridge. There accordingly I found him, and on expressing my satisfaction at seeing him so far on his way to Mr. Burton's, he begged that I would not infer from the fact of his being on the way that he was going there. Naturally enough at such an odd remark my inclination was to laugh, and to try a little banter; but for this his tone was too grave and sincere. "I have come out," he added, "to try whether the delightful air of this fine summer evening will do anything to dispel that intolerable languor and deep-seated suffering that distract me, and to which I have been a martyr for days." I tried to persuade him that as there was no party—only my uncle and another friend—a little society might probably help him towards attaining a more cheerful state of mind. But he would not be induced. He said he felt so wretched

that he could not face any one—that there were times when he fled from his best friends, and that this was one of them. Besides, he said that if he went he would be compelled, by a desire to bring himself up to something like the common level of humanity, to take some stimulant, a little wine or spirits, and that for such indulgence, even to an amount which in any other person would be not only ordinary but trivial, he should afterwards suffer the pangs of hell. "Oh, my God," he exclaimed, "the miseries I have been born to endure; what tortures I have suffered, and what tortures am I yet doomed to suffer." I was greatly pained and distressed. Nothing, he said, but a large dose of laudanum gave him relief; that he took such a dose to enable him to get through a burst of work occasionally, but that he dare not repeat it too often, and so in the intervals he had nothing for it but to endure.

We wandered, as usual, into all sorts of subjects, and amongst others he spoke of Dugald Stewart, whom he did not estimate highly, referring to the slight notice he took

of Kant as evidence of his not being at all alive to the magnitude of the revolution which Kant's system of philosophy was calculated to effect. With considerable persuasion I got him to go so far as the north end of Ann Street, which I was enabled to do the more readily as he said he recollected that Wilson lived in that street in his early days. I had drawn him thither with a vague hope that if Burton had been on the outlook we might have pulled him in after all. But, unfortunately, no such chance occurred, and we parted at the end of the street, he insisting that I should not make myself late by going back with him.

On Saturday, 29th July, of the same year, I called on De Quincey at his lodgings in Lothian Street, to ask him to come round to my uncle's to supper next evening, when we expected Burton, who had been disappointed by his previous non-appearance. We had some talk about Burton and his prodigious power of working. "He seems," said De Quincey, "to hunger and thirst after opportunities of working, a feeling which I am

perfectly incapable of comprehending." We talked of Burton's appointment as Secretary of the Prison Board, and De Quincey remarked that he was well acquainted with his predecessor, Mr. Ludovic Colquhoun. He knew the family, and had often been asked to Mr. Colquhoun's, or his father's to dinner; and, though he never went, he had frequently called to apologise for not having gone. We talked about his (De Quincey's) articles on Pope, Shakspeare, and Goethe, in the seventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. On my telling him how much pleased I had been to find my own preconceived notions of Goethe confirmed by his high authority, and by the good reasons he gave for such opinion, he went pretty fully into the whole question of the nature of Goethe's genius. Among other things he mentioned that Wordsworth, who was apt to take extreme opinions upon such subjects, regarded Goethe as little better than a quack. Wordsworth, he said, never read books, but somehow or other *Wilhelm Meister* had fallen in his way, and he had gone through

it till he came to the scene where the hero, in his mistress's bedroom, becomes sentimental over her dirty towels, etc., which struck him with such disgust that he flung the book out of his hand, would never look at it again, and declared that surely no English lady would ever read such a work.

Invited to return to see him, I called from time to time; half an hour's conversation with him was a privilege I valued too highly to risk drawing upon it too often. He was ready to talk on any subject; the day's news; the articles in the *Scotsman;* recent books; our common friends; anything that came uppermost; for he was in converse a man of the world, and no mere pedant or bookworm. At times he would play, as it were, with trivial topics in talk; treating them with a sort of mock importance. For example, in this way he once entered into a long dissertation on the troubles of dressing. Shaving, especially, he said, was a grand difficulty. After collecting the best information on the subject, he had purchased a set of first-rate razors, but he had been told that

they could not be kept in order without continual stropping, a task to which he could not think of subjecting himself; besides which there was the necessity for keeping a soap-box, an article of furniture he utterly abhorred. Some years after he solved the difficulty by allowing his beard to grow. The first time that I saw him in this state, the under part of his face covered with thin gray hair, he explained to me that his hirsute condition was not owing to his having joined the "mustache movement," as it was called. He hoped that I would acquit him of any such utter imbecility as that. It all arose, he said, from the old difficulty of razors. He could not be troubled shaving himself, and he could not endure any other person shaving him. The intolerable smell of a barber's fingers in every case in which he had attempted to undergo the operation, had filled him with disgust so great that he could barely muster courage and politeness to endure its being carried out.[1]

[1] Once when he had walked in from Lasswade to dine at George Square he was shown into a room to

On one occasion (14th November 1854) I called to ask for him, he having sent word that from illness he could not come to supper

wash in which was a fixed basin with hot and cold water, an arrangement not so common thirty years ago as now. Turning on the water, I left for a moment to fetch a towel, and on my return found Mr. De Quincey standing in an attitude of paralysed perplexity a little way off from the nearly brimful basin. His alarm was lest the basin should overflow and deluge the room, an evil which I explained was provided against. He justified his fears by calling attention to the rapid inflow of the water, and made the most amusing comparisons of himself to the hero of the German story *Undine*, overwhelmed by waters which he had conjured up but could not control. I daresay he must have used to me in his description of his plight some such phrases as that very characteristic one in his *Logic of Political Economy*, in which he speaks of water bearing no value in a country like this "except under that machinery of costly arrangements which delivers it as a permanent and guaranteed succession into the very chambers where it is to be used." His language naturally and unavoidably shaped itself into such stately phrases; if any auditor were tempted to smile at their occasionally somewhat inappropriate pomp and elegance he would have readily joined in the laugh—though, indeed, he rarely laughed at all—and would have amplified the illustrations and heightened the humour of the occasion.

at George Square as he had promised to do. He stated that he had made an effort to write an explanatory note, but was unable to do so, and had been obliged to content himself with a message. His foot, he said, had been affected by his having been taking large doses of opium; "in fact," he said, "my leg is quite black, from the foot to considerably above the knee." He treated lightly my expressions of regret at such an alarming appearance, saying that he had had it before, and knew how far it would go, and how it could be got quit of.[1] The best cure, he said, would be to take six months' walking; on which I said that his case was like that of St. Denis:—"*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*" How was he to begin this regimen? He answered that by his leaving off opium, even for a few days, his leg would so far recover as to enable him to go out; "but," he says, "I cannot do that, for without opium

[1] In an unpublished letter, of date March 9, 1846, he speaks of an abrasion on his heel having "brought back that dreadful *Purpura* from which I suffered so much for three years."

I can't get on with my work, which the publishers are urging me to complete. The work must be done; the opium can't be left off; therefore I cannot begin to walk, and the leg must take its chance."

He remained in these lodgings from 1854 until his death five years afterwards; his temporary residence thus becoming permanent, with, I believe, an interval of not more than five or six months at Lasswade. This was extremely characteristic; in fact he had walked into town from Lasswade to these lodgings, where he had been some years before, without any preparation in the way of luggage or otherwise; and he explained to me if it had not been that his landlady, Mrs. Wilson, being a conscientious and careful woman, had preserved for him a quantity of clothing which he had left on his former sojourn, he would have been in sad straits as to dress. Into such straits he occasionally lapsed afterwards, for I remember his frankly telling me that on one occasion he could not go out to walk because he had not a pair of trousers. Of course it was sheer

carelessness on his part; even the vigilant supervision of his daughters was insufficient to keep him, in these matters, in anything like the condition of ordinary mortals.

Thus far I have brought my recollections into something of consecutive and connected order; for the rest, I must be content to present them rather disjointedly; or, at least as mere notes or memoranda.

30*th July* 1854.—De Quincey came to supper with us in George Square on Sunday. We were *en famille;*[1] the only other guest

[1] My grand-uncle's family consisted of his niece my mother, my two sisters, and myself; and an old habit was kept up by the household of having a small supper on Sunday evening at the highly unfashionable hour of nine o'clock, at which one or two friends usually dropped in. To my uncle, who was at that time nearly eighty years of age—he died in 1870, having almost completed his ninety-third year—Mr. De Quincey took a great liking, admiring and commenting on his great mental and physical vigour in advanced age, and on his independence and strength of judgment. Though nearly fifteen years younger than my uncle, De Quincey looked the older man of the two, and, both, having personal memories of events of

being Burton. We spoke of the different habits of men in drinking different liquors. He said he used to be fond of gin and water, and drank it till Byron's Life was published, when he gave it up, because he did not wish to be accused, however falsely, of imitating Byron, even in that. He was much amused by my account of a scene between Sydney Dobell, Professor Piazzi Smyth, Mr. Augustus St. John, and Leitch Ritchie, which I told him I had witnessed.[1] The incident had occurred a short time previously (4th February) and was this:—Leitch Ritchie had asked some

earlier date than we of a second or third generation, they found many topics of mutual interest apart from literature and politics. My uncle's natural courtesy and kindness of disposition likewise attracted De Quincey, as it did Thackeray, who always spoke of him as "that kind old gentleman."

[1] Mr. Leitch Ritchie was at this time editing *Chambers's Journal*; Mr. Robert Chambers was one of this party. His brother William Chambers spoke of Leitch Ritchie to Thackeray as "the most gentlemanly literary man we (*i.e.* the Messrs. W. and R. Chambers) had ever had to do with," a saying which Thackeray repeated with an expression of supreme scorn.

friends to supper at his house (32 Danube Street, Edinburgh), to meet Mr. John Augustus St. John, author of several books of travel, a fine looking man of between sixty and seventy, who had lost his eyesight from ophthalmia in Egypt. Among those who arrived early, was Mr. Piazzi Smyth, Professor of Astronomy, Edinburgh University. He has an impediment in his speech which sometimes altogether prevents utterance for a few moments. Leitch Ritchie himself, again, was extremely deaf. The deaf man, the blind man, and the stammering man, were all the company who had arrived, except Dr. Findlater[1] and myself, when the door opened and Mr. Sydney Dobell was announced. Dobell rushing into the room, as soon as Leitch Ritchie mentioned in a vague way, "Mr. Dobell—Mr. St. John," seized by the hand, not Mr. St. John, but Professor Smyth, and began a speech he evidently had cut and dry. "And is it possible that I hold by the hand one who bears the illustrious name of St. John!" Smyth in vain attempted to assert his identity;

[1] Editor of *Chambers's Encyclopædia*, etc.

his tongue refused its office. Leitch Ritchie, not hearing Dobell's hushed tones, looked on bewildered. It was the blind man, Mr. St. John himself, who came to the rescue, saying, "It is I whose name is St. John." Whereupon Dobell turned to him and began "Oh, then, is it possible, etc." Findlater and I not being sufficiently familiar in the house, and knowing none of the parties except Smyth and Ritchie, had not felt it right to interfere, but remained amazed and amused spectators. Of course Dobell's speech fell very flat, and, besides, St. John further set him down, though gently, by telling him he had no connection with the Bolingbroke family. De Quincey said the complication was as complete as anything the older dramatists ever fancied. He said that walking—a long walk—gave extraordinary depth and spirituality of expression to ladies' eyes. Mr. Burton towards midnight hinted that he was waiting for him to give the signal to rise. De Quincey protested *he* had been waiting for him, Burton. Burton said he could not think of rising before him. We all talked

away for a time, and Burton again spoke of going. "Oh, no," says De Quincey, "since you give *me* the privilege of fixing the time I shall not be coerced, and, even to show my independence, shall have a little more brandy and water and conversation."[1]

19th September 1854.—De Quincey dined with us at George Square—with Russel. I called for him at his lodgings in Lothian Street at a quarter before five. He drew my attention to his being ready before the time, pointing to the clock. The weather had been very fine, but the sky was beginning to get cloudy and gray, and I said that I feared a change. De Quincey said "Yes, but it will be gradual. All the great operations of nature are slow, and the grand dome of fine weather which has hung over us for weeks is not to be lightly or suddenly broken up." Some rather dirty little children were lingering in the common passage of the stair as we came out to the street. He smiled his

[1] Sometimes De Quincey preferred to come after dinner, rather than sit through a meal of which he could partake so little. See page 54.

sweet pensive smile, and patted one of them on the head—she, poor little thing, rather shrinking from the attentions offered by so weird-looking a patron. He turned to me, and we smiled together.

At dinner Mr. Russel asked him why he lived in town at this season when he had such a nice place in the country. He said, "The convenience consists in this; that there seems less criminality in disappointing printers when they send only to the next street, than when they come seven miles." I asked him about his daughters. Miss Florence had been expected from Ireland on Friday, and he had been out at Lasswade on that day, but had not waited to see her. "She was expected at six, and I left at five." In course of some talk about Professor Wilson, Mr. Russel remarked on his pension, and on his having had to go to the Whigs for it. De Quincey spoke of its disproportionate amount —£300, one fourth of the whole sum annually allowed for literary distinction to be absorbed by Wilson. We spoke of Wilson's thin-skinnedness. Quillinan's poems

were reviewed by "Blackwood" as "Poems by a Heavy Dragoon." Quillinan in retaliation parodied in verse Lockhart's description of Wilson in "Peter's Letters. One of the lines was:—

"And catch a pig, although its tail be soaped."

Wilson's resentment was intense. Mrs. Wordsworth asked Wilson some time afterwards, when he happened to be in the Lake district, if he would object to dine with Quillinan. He fired up and exclaimed, "Oh, no, I'll dine with the Devil if he be asked to the same party." De Quincey remarked as a bad feature in Wilson's character his love to be surrounded by parasites —persons who were lower in position than himself, and who ministered to his vanity. He ridiculed the sickly, false sentiment of his works, and their evidently insincere and vulgar, over-wrought religionism. His works —his tales at least—were a jest among the Wordsworths. De Quincey spoke of Wilson as a lecturer. He had heard him once or twice. All dignity and impressiveness as a

lecturer were destroyed by his drawing his forefinger down the side of his nose at the end of almost every paragraph. De Quincey's imitation of the action was very droll. He said that the hearer began to anticipate it whenever he saw Wilson coming to a pause, and the fulfilment of the expectation raised a sense of the ridiculous even in Wilson's grandest passages. His perverse emphasis—on "this," and "and," and "of," and other insignificant words—was also very distressing to a sensitive ear.

We asked De Quincey about Wordsworth's personal appearance. His figure, he said, was bad, and his walking "sidling," he did not keep his own line of path. Wordsworth thanked God that there was only one man in England he would go out of his way to see, namely, Belzoni. De Quincey remarked on the beggarly idea of renown Wordsworth entertained in regarding as nothing all the intellect and worth of England as compared with a man seven feet high, who could walk about with a living pyramid on his shoulders. Wordsworth's scorn of public opinion was

excessive. It was not superciliousness, but an almost inhuman scorn. This was a natural reaction of the abuse he suffered early. He (De Quincey) had, he said, on one occasion to show the honours of the vale of Grasmere to a French visitor, and was greatly diverted by Wordsworth's and the Frenchman's almost unconcealed contempt for each other. Wordsworth's feeling was on account of the French Revolution, and from a neglect and scorn of strangers in general; and the Frenchman's feeling arose from his having derived all his ideas of Wordsworth from the *Edinburgh Review*, and regarding him as the very imbecile of literature. "Nothing," De Quincey remarked, "could be more unfortunate than the titles given to Wordsworth's larger poems. The argument of the 'Excursion' has nothing to do with the accident of the excursion that gives its name to the poem. Then the 'Prelude' has a name equally inappropriate. He designed it as the opening of a great poem, but as the great poem was never finished, the 'Prelude' stands as an opening

to nothing. The chief weakness of the 'Excursion' lies in the commonplace nature of its religious sentiment—nothing higher than what you might hear intelligent old women talk on such subjects."

Of Mrs. Crowe as a writer he expressed great admiration, especially as to her power in arranging plots. Her machinery was coarse—a murder—but the ingenuity with which in *Men and Women* she distributes the suspicion of the murder between four or five persons was most masterly.

He spoke highly of Southey; his strict honour and good-nature, and mentioned his feeling of humiliation in having his articles in the *Quarterly* altered by Gifford. De Quincey said Lamb was one of the most loving and delightful of men; Southey one of the most estimable.

We talked of Hannah More. De Quincey's mother built a house near Hannah More's for the express pleasure of enjoying her society. De Quincey himself, though not admiring her, was of course compelled to tolerate her. The Mores were six maiden

sisters, the youngest sixty, and the eldest eighty. Miss More's manner was very ladylike and refined, and her sisters were very nice women, "but eaten up with the cant of Methodism." Remarking on Sheridan's giving Wilberforce's name instead of his own when found lying drunk, De Quincey went on to picture Wilberforce's horror at having in succession all the seven deadly sins fastened down upon him by similar imputations. Hannah More was ignorant of Wordsworth's merits as a poet till she was struck with the extracts from the "Excursion" given in the *Edinburgh Review*. She could not believe that these noble Miltonic lines had been written by a man whom the reviewers had been assailing for years. "Of course," said De Quincey, "I had too mean an opinion of Miss More's intellectual powers to have condescended to indicate Wordsworth's abilities to her."

Of Moore's *Byron* he spoke as a miserable piece of biography, slovenly and slight. With the materials Moore might have made an admirable Life.

On one occasion we had a conversation on the chances of long life. De Quincey said it had been observed that people had not the same chance of long life if one or other of their parents had not attained it. "Now, as my mother survived till she was nearly a hundred, I fear that I shall be compelled to drag out existence to a protracted period, and I look forward with horror to being left helpless, a burden and trouble to others." I reminded him that as his mother had retained all her faculties, he had the best hope of doing so also. "True," he replied, "but she was one of the most temperate of beings, living a pure and gentle life. Now, I have tampered so much with opium, and tried my mind and health in so many ways, that I cannot look for a like immunity from the natural ills of age." I referred him to my uncle as an example of cheerful and contented old age, with full possession of all the faculties.

2d December 1854.—Called on De Quincey at Lothian Street, and found him seated in bed, dressed in a flannel vest with sleeves,

and his bed covered with books, papers, etc. He apologised for so receiving me; said he seldom rose till four or five; for though uncomfortable everywhere, he was less uncomfortable in bed than anywhere else. I asked him if he had heard from his daughters. He said not lately, and that he could not expect to do so, for he had not written to them, or rather he had never despatched his letters to them—for he *had* written many—and that there were probably thirty or forty pages of unsent notes to them lying somewhere about his room.

I mentioned Ferrier's *Institutes of Metaphysic*, just published. De Quincey said he had the highest possible opinion of Ferrier's powers of thinking; but that he could not from Ferrier's letters comprehend his system, and was anxious to see his book, in the hope that it would make the matter clearer.[1]

[1] When Ferrier was a candidate for the Chair of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh, De Quincey wrote a testimonial for him; a highly characteristic production—a disquisition in the form of a testi-

We spoke of the remarkable change that had recently been gradually wrought in toleration of freedom of thought on religious subjects. De Quincey said he tried thirty years ago to get a bookseller to accept a translation of Strauss, but that everybody shrank from it. "But now, Strauss is not only translated but patronised, talked about, and introduced into society, like a tiger into a drawing-room." He spoke of a professor of heterodox opinions in this country having been in the position of a man seeing a crowd with angry eyes on every side of him.[1]

2d March 1855.—Misses Florence and Emily de Quincey were at an evening party with us last night, and they were to stay over to-day. I asked Mr. De Quincey, who was staying in Lothian Street, to come down to dinner at five, or in the evening. He sent word that he would come at six; then a note. It was as follows:—

monial—which may be seen by the curious in the collection of such documents in the Advocates' Library.

[1] See Appendix B.

"*Friday, 2d March.*

"MY DEAR SIR—It struck me, as a causist, that an answer almost rude, which should not keep your messenger waiting, must be preferable in your eyes to any answer more entirely ceremonious, that should occupy the time of your servant at an hour when perhaps it would be most in request. The rudeness I should have left to heal itself. But it strikes me suddenly that I may have left room for a misconstruction, or rather for a suspicion upon your part of a misconstruction upon mine. By saying that I would come down at six, it is just possible that I may seem to have misread your dinner-hour, as being six instead of five. This is not the case. I meant to say that I would come immediately *after* dinner; which *now*, on revising my plan, I will assume to be nearly seven. Having no paper accessible at this moment, I use a fragment of your own note.—Ever, my dear Sir, Your obliged,

"THOMAS DE QUINCEY."

He came and remained talking with my uncle and the rest till eleven. I had to leave early for my night's work. Talking of Words-

worth's *Guide to the Lakes*, De Quincey said that on its original publication he offered Wordsworth an account of the origin and character of the language of the Lake district, which unlocked all its peculiar nomenclature; but "Wordsworth, who never liked to be obliged to anybody for anything, declined it in his usual haughty and discourteous manner, and it was ultimately published in a Kendal newspaper."[1]

2d May 1855.—Called on De Quincey at Lothian Street. Found him in his room, with a small glass half filled with liquor of the colour of pale port, and a phial of undiluted laudanum beside it on the table, which was covered as usual with books and papers. He complained of pain in his left arm which, as he described it, seemed like rheumatism. It prevented his sleeping, and, unfortunately, he said, laudanum had no effect on it. I advised him to try chloroform, applied externally, which led to some talk about chloroform. Then of vaccination, and

[1] No doubt in the *Westmoreland Gazette*, of which De Quincey was himself editor in 1819.

the immunity it afforded from the curse of small-pox. I remarked on the fewer persons marked with small-pox now to be seen in the streets. He said that it was still more noticeable some years ago in contrasting Englishmen with foreigners, who were marked in far greater proportion. I mentioned Pope's allusion to small-pox, as one of the greatest curses of life, classed by him with old age, in the *Rape of the Lock*, and De Quincey expressed surprise at his not recollecting the couplet. He spoke of small-pox as a disfigurement, and said it was difficult to imagine a more horrible moment than that in which a once beautiful young woman, who had suffered from the frightful disease, looked in her mirror again for the first time. Fortunately, he said, human life seldom presented in its course such fearful trials of fortitude.[1]

17th November 1856.—Called on De Quincey in Lothian Street about five. Found him at tea; his room littered with MSS., books, etc.; small glass of laudanum in one hand, teacup in other. I called to ask him

[1] See Appendix C.

to dine with us, to meet Thackeray, on the following Saturday. He said he would do his best to come, but had work on hand which he must have finished this week, and also that he had not been out of his house since May.

Talk of his revised *Confessions*, just published. On my alluding to a note referring to Coleridge's opinion on the famous passage in Job, "I know, etc," and to Dr. Robert Lee being engaged in a controversy with the *Witness* newspaper on this point, he asked me if Dr. Lee knew of Coleridge's opinion. I told him I had sent Dr. Lee the volume of his *Selections*, in which the passage is commented on, and that he was much pleased with it. De Quincey said that the last conversation he had had with Coleridge was about this very passage. Coleridge had in his writings declared against the commonly received opinion about it; but De Quincey having heard he had retracted, questioned him about it. Sara Coleridge, his daughter, "full of talent, learning, and piety—rather too much of that indeed"—

had induced him to retract, or to appear to do so, because the opinions he had expressed were disagreeable to the pietist connection in which she moved. But the impression De Quincey's conversation with him left was that Coleridge had not done so sincerely, but only for peace. "For myself," said De Quincey, "I should as soon expect to find something about the blood of Christ blurting out in the pages of Livy or Plato as an allusion to immortality in this old Arabian writer."

On the Saturday a little note came from De Quincey as follows:—

"MY DEAR SIR—On Wednesday evening I was obliged to attend a party, from which I returned with a most distressing affection of the chest; and since then the greater part of every day has been passed in bed. To-day up to 3 o'clock I endeavoured to struggle with it, but have been obliged to go to bed. I am ashamed to have caused you any trouble; but in deep sincerity I am wholly disabled even for sitting up.—Pray believe me your obliged

"THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

"*Sat. 22d November.*"

When I told Thackeray that we had hoped to get De Quincey to come to meet him, he said he felt much flattered, and that nothing would have pleased him more than to have met a man whose writings he so much admired. I handed him the note of apology; he praised in his quietly enthusiastic way the extreme neatness of its style, and penmanship, and antique courtesy of its tone.

Two other notes referring to invitations are characteristic enough to be recorded. They are of dates 29th January and 30th January 1859. I was anxious to get De Quincey to meet our friend Mr. Carruthers of Inverness, who remembered him in old times; and wished to renew the acquaintance. The reference in the first letter to "Miss Jean Stark" is to his landlady's sister, whose attention and devotion to him partook of

"The constant service of the antique world,"

and showed strongly his power of attracting and enchaining interest in all who came in

contact with him.[1] His allusions to Mr. Russel's articles explain themselves; and his final congratulation to the *Scotsman* is in reference to Miss Isa Craig (now Mrs. Knox) having just gained the prize of 50 guineas for the Centenary Burns Ode offered by the Crystal Palace Company.

LETTER.

"You will find somewhere below, but buried in a heap of words, that, to my great regret, I shall not be able to join your party to-day.

"MY DEAR SIR—I beg your pardon for what must have seemed inattention in acknowledging no sooner your kind invitation for to-day. But literally I *could* not. What you were told yesterday, viz., that I had gone abroad to walk, was a romantic fiction, 'pure and simple,' of Miss Jean Stark's. And certainly, when her 'hand was in,' she might as well have asserted that I was botanising on the Himalayahs—which would have been conclusive, needing no more words—whereas now she has left to you the labour of reading, to me of explaining, that in order to meet the anxiety of my publisher

[1] See Page's *Life;* and Masson's *De Quincey.*

(who knows, or who fancies, a special benefit from publishing in January), I *was* last night, and *am* through this day, entangled in the very final arrears and valedictory *P.S.* of my 10th vol. The word *10th* makes me ashamed; but it is Boston that is answerable, Yankee Boston. I am, as it happens, unable at this time to walk; *that* might have been remedied by a cab; but there is a more complex hindrance from the grievous defect (or default, or how shall I express it?) of an 'amanuensis—my youngest daughter, who otherwise is my right hand, being unavoidably absent in Tipperary; and thus it is that I am embargoed triply in this anchorage of No. 42 L. Street.

"Whilst waiting to hear from the Press, let me mention that I have some half-dozen 'plaints' against Mr. Russel as regards statements of fact. One, a bagatelle, arises this morning as to Lord Ripon. 1stly, His exact nickname was *Prosperity Fred.* 2dly, This name was given to him by Cobbett. So far I am sure; at least *positive*—which means *obstinate.* 3dly, I think, but am not *viciously* certain, that the name had no special reference to any prediction; rather, I should say, to his

retrospects ; to the general flattering haze with which he invested his budgets, or prefatory abstracts when introducing his budgets as Ch. of the Exch. Was it not *Prosp. Fred* who made the discovery that Taxes 'fructify' in our pockets?

"It must be a great satisfaction and a just ground of pride to the *Scotsman* establishment that a foster child of their own evocation, a daughter of their own encouragement, should have had this distinguished success—being herself crowned amidst her own act of coronation—reaping whilst she thought only of sowing.

"I halt suddenly but unavoidably; for the Fiend is up from St. Andrew Sq. seeking whom ——

"Ever most truly yours,

"THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

"*Sat. 29th Jan.*"

The second note is as follows :—

"*Sunday, 30th Jan.*

"MY DEAR SIR—Nothing is more distressing to me than the being compelled by uncontrollable accidents to decline what I should natur-

ally regard as an invitation alike flattering and friendly. Nine days hence you will yourself understand from a letter which I will then write to you, how impossible it was for me to do otherwise.

"Mr. Carruthers I had a special interest in meeting about 20 years ago; if I do not greatly mistake I met him—not *at* Prof. Wilson's house —*but in his company*. Since then Mr. Carruthers has written, with results known to the Antipodes (who, however, continue little the better for the information constantly reaching them) on the Biography of Pope. Consequently, having myself also troubled those waters—tho' only enough to stir up the mud—I have a personal as well as a general interest in *him*. So I should have made an effort, you may be sure, to meet him.

"That fair *Incognita* who condescended to leave the letter of invitation, connected herself in the strangest fashion of cross-readings with the final words of my dreams; which dreams she broke up; so that in fact I have a message for her from the land of dreams, true and false.

"Yours ever; excuse the writing; it has suddenly (3.30) grown dark as Erebus."

It will be seen that in the sudden darkness of the winter afternoon he had omitted to append his signature; and it is, I daresay, needless to add that the explanatory letter, to be written "nine days hence," never came to hand. The "fair *Incognita*" was simply the maid who had handed in my note.

For a year or two before he died Mr. De Quincey rarely moved out of doors. I called on him from time to time, but have no notes of those later interviews. Once Miss Jean Stark reported that he regretted he could not see me, as he was particularly engaged; and the next time I went he was profuse in apologies, stating that he had been in a chaos of books and manuscripts and clouds of dust, searching for a missing document of some importance. The confusion of this sort in which he lived was marvellous. After his death Mrs. Craig told me that the mass of letters and notes, many unopened, to be gone over was bewildering. In the heterogeneous heap, too, stray pound notes and packages of small coin, in silver and copper, were so numerous as, when collected, to form a consider-

able sum. Some of the notes were between the leaves of books; the parcels of coin had probably been handed to him as change, laid aside, and forgotten. The task of looking over lent books, and returning them to their owners, as far as these could be discovered, was also a heavy one.

During his last illness he sent for me, and I saw him several times. On the last occasion I remained only a few minutes, as he was extremely feeble; yet in all his weakness his wonted courtesy prompted him, on my rising to leave, to deplore that, from inability to rise, or even to turn fully in bed, he was unable to ring, and that so I was left to show myself out. His youngest and only unmarried daughter, Emily, was with him at this time, and she promised to let me know if I, or any of our family, could be of any service. We did not therefore risk disturbing them by sending or calling often, and indeed, having had experience of his surprising recoveries from previous illnesses, we were not fully alive to the gravity of this one. Most unfortunately, two notes which Miss De Quincey

posted to me failed, through being imperfectly addressed, to reach me in time. On the afternoon of the 8th December 1859 a rumour reached me that De Quincey was dead, and I hastened to Lothian Street, in some hope, however faint, that rumour lied. "Is what I hear true?" I said to the kind landlady, Mrs. Wilson, who opened the door. Without answering she ushered me at once into the chamber of death. On the simple uncurtained pallet, whence in that last interview he had smilingly, with all those delicately polite regrets, said goodbye, the tiny frame of this great dreamer lay stretched in his last long dreamless sleep. Attenuated to an extreme degree, the body looked infantile in size—a very slender stem for the shapely and massive head that crowned it. The face was little changed; its delicate bloom indeed was gone, but the sweet expression lingered, and the finely-chiselled features were unaltered. I was profoundly impressed; the more so, perhaps, that, as it so happened, I had never seen a dead person since I was a child of seven years old. In the next room

I found his tearful and agitated daughters—Mrs. Craig, who had arrived a day or two before, and Miss Emily. They spoke much of the patience and resignation with which he suffered; of his gentleness and considerateness to the last. He grudged giving them the slightest trouble, even when he most required attendance. On one occasion when they were moving him in bed, and lifting his feet, he, using a grand generalisation in a spirit of the most profound humility, and snatching, as it were, at a sacred sanction for his exacting the care he needed, said, "Be gentle, be tender; remember that those are the feet that Christ washed."

Ascertaining that there existed no adequate portrait of Mr. De Quincey in his later years, I suggested that a cast of his face should be taken. This was done by Mr. (now Sir) John Steell, R.S.A.; and from this cast, aided by other materials, this eminent sculptor produced, in the shape of a noble marble bust, a permanent record of the strikingly intellectual and refined lineaments of "The English Opium Eater."

APPENDIX A.

P. 2. MRS. BAIRD SMITH with her daughters and Miss De Quincey now live in London. To all the three daughters no small share of their father's attractive intellectual qualities descended; to the eldest, perhaps, in somewhat fuller measure, especially in so far as a certain fluent facility and felicity of expression in talk and writing reflected, in a softer and feminine fashion, the celerity of conception and copious stores of reflection and information so notable in her father.

Mrs. Baird Smith's contributions to Mr. Page's *Life*[1] of her father sufficiently indicate her fine literary faculty, and Miss Emily, in the same pages, displays a like gift.

It may be permitted here to make some mention of the services of Colonel Baird Smith; ser-

[1] *Thomas De Quincey: his Life and Writings*, by H. A. Page. Two vols. London, 1877.

vice faithful unto death. The brief record on his tomb in Calcutta Cathedral is as follows :—

Colonel Richard Baird Smith of the Bengal Engineers, Master of the Calcutta Mint, C.B. and A.D.C. to the Queen, whose career, crowded with brilliant service, cut short at its brightest, was born at Lasswade on the 31st of Dec. 1818. He went to India in 1836. Already distinguished in thé two Sikh Wars, his conduct on the outbreak of revolt in 1857 showed what a clear apprehension, a stout heart, and a hopeful spirit could effect with scanty means in crushing disorder. Called to Delhi as chief engineer, his bold and ready judgment, his weighty and tenacious counsels, played a foremost part in securing the success of the siege and England's supremacy. The gathered wisdom of many years spent in administering the Irrigation of Upper India, trained him for his crowning service—the survey of the great famine of 1861, the provision of relief, and the suggestions of safeguards against such calamities. Broken by accumulated labours, he died at sea Dec. 13, 1861, aged scarcely 43 years. At Madras, where his Indian career began, his body awaits the resurrection.

There may be added, in correction of a misapprehension as to his share in the work at Delhi, the following from Colonel Malleson's *History of the Indian Mutiny of* 1857.

"Major Baird Smith, an honour even to the corps of engineers . . . was chief engineer of the army before Delhi, and brought to the performance of his

duties the large mind, the profound knowledge, the prompt decision, which had characterised him in his civil work. Neither the shock and pain caused by a wound, nor the weakness and emaciation produced by a severe attack of camp scurvy, aggravated by diarrhœa, depressed his spirits or lessened his energies. Refusing to be placed on the sick list, though assured that mortification would be the result of a continued use of this wounded leg, *Baird Smith clung to the last to the performance of his duty.* The advice which he gave to General Wilson proved that never was his courage higher, never were the tone and temper of his mind more healthy, than when, bowed down by two diseases, and suffering acutely from his wound, he seemed a livid wreck of the man he once had been. It was to such a man that Wilson appealed. The answer was clear, emphatic, and decisive. Baird Smith was for action, for prompt and immediate action."

APPENDIX B.

P. 54. His daughters were at this time in Ireland, and though very ill he was reluctant to hurry them home. His condition seemed so serious that I felt it a duty to force his hand so to speak, and of the results he gives the following account in a letter to Miss Florence :—

December 8, 1854. My Dearest Florence—This morning—viz. Monday, December 4th—came into

my hands your letter and Emily's appendix. I had, however, previously possessed myself of a pen, and was in visionary conceit tracing out, whilst yet unaware of any communication from Tipperary, that letter which now, three hours later, I am actually writing. The fact is, I am alarmed at the premature explosion of a train which I had laid on Saturday (December 2d) for drawing your attention in a leisurely way to Mavis Bush. The match has ignited the train far sooner than I had counted on. And thus it is possible enough that you may be thrown into needless hurry. It had happened that on Saturday the 2d, Mr. Findlay called, as sometimes he is kind enough to do, and on my explaining the general course of my correspondence with you—viz. that I write a letter—parboil it, as you may say, *i.e.* half-finish it, then order it, in House of Commons phrase, "to lie on the table," during which repose several strata of other papers gather over it within a few days or hours, so that very soon it is "snowed up," and finally it withdraws into darkness. Hearing this, I say, Mr. Findlay kindly undertook to apprise you, or M. or E., how the matter stood, and that the time was drawing near when I should want various papers (now at Mavis Bush) for the fifth volume. This service I counted on his fulfilling about four or five days later. But, behold! yesterday being Sunday, the very next succeeding day he called with a *Times* newspaper, and at the same time left a note informing me that he already *had* written—viz. not to any one of you three, but to Mr. Craig. I am anxious, therefore, as the train is actually fired, to intercept any evil consequences. I announce, there-

fore, that if you could set off ten or eleven days from this, *i.e.* about the 18th day of December, you will meet the most clamorous of my purposes. You see there are counter-perils to weigh off against the perils of procrastination. I declare it will be a lesson to me for the rest of my life not to hurry.

The *Times* contained a review of his works. A month after this he was again alarmingly ill —see Page, vol. 2, p. 94.

APPENDIX C.

P. 57. There is a lapse here in my notes which may be appropriately supplied by a notice by De Quincey himself of one of his visits to my uncle's house. In a letter addressed to his daughters of date July 31, 1855, the following passage occurs :—

Last week, viz. on Thursday the 26th of July, I dined by invitation with a small party—*men* only—at Mr. Ritchie's in George Square. Mr. Ritchie and his family have been very kind in their attentions to me. But, to finish my story of the dinner-party,—on entering the drawing-room, inquiries buzzed about me as to your whereabouts and intentions with regard to the homeward route, etc. ; and upon my answering that I had reason to look for you (speaking nautically) "*in all August,*" somebody said, "We understand, Mr. De Quincey, you are going to lose another of your

daughters." This arose naturally out of a previous inquiry about M. and the chances of her coming over to England; but it took me so far by surprise that I did not know how to treat it, for I was not certain as to F.'s own wishes on this point. However, I said, smiling, that such a rumour was certainly current. "Aye, but it's more than a rumour," said Mr. Russel, the editor of the *Scotsman;* and then it came out that on the morning of this very Thursday a son of Lord Dunfermline's, one of the Abercrombies, who is now by accident on a visit to Edinburgh, had announced the news as highly probable. He is our British Minister at Turin; and it had so happened, that when Colonel Baird Smith was studying the system of irrigation in the King of Sardinia's Continental dominions (Piedmont, etc.), he was invited to take up his quarters in the hotel of our English Legation, which he did, and thus became intimately acquainted with Sir Ralph, for I believe that this son of Lord D.'s is the one known as Sir Ralph A. So that here is at once an end to all further secrecy, if you had any wish for it. On this occasion, by the way, as previously at Mr. J. B.'s, I found all persons loud in the praise of Colonel Baird Smith.

Sir Ralph, it may be noted, was the only son of the first Lord Dunfermline (James Abercrombie, speaker of the House of Commons); he succeeded his father as second Lord Dunfermline, and dying without male issue, with him the title became extinct.

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